



Marine Environmental History

SEA 3023 (4 credit hours)

60 contact hours

Course Overview

Marine Environmental History (MEH) is a four-credit course that begins and ends in Woods Hole and includes a seagoing component in the middle. We will begin by exploring the links between indigenous and colonial historical trends that span the northwest Atlantic. Our work will continue with consideration of the extractive nature of colonial endeavors and the human responses to the environmental impacts of increasingly limited access to resources. In addition, we will trace the development of Environmental History, Environmental Science, and the rise of Environmental Justice movements in their marine contexts.

Contact me anytime to discuss your progress in class, ways to improve learning, or other topics!

Course Instructor

Professor of Marine Environmental History

Course Footprint

Component	Duration	Location
Shore	Mid-May	Woods Hole, MA
Sea	Late May	SSV <i>Corwith Cramer</i> sailing Woods Hole to Woods Hole
Shore	Early June	Woods Hole, MA

Land Acknowledgement



We see that we in Falmouth are on the traditional homeland of the Wampanoag people who live and continue to thrive here after thousands of years of residence. We also acknowledge the painful history of Colonization that has enacted forced assimilation, slavery, genocide, and efforts by many to eliminate the Wampanoag people along with their culture. We respect and honor the indigenous people still connected to this land and are willing to learn from the Wampanoag way of life. We recognize that these words are not enough and need to be followed with action steps. Whose Land Are You On? Check out [Native Land](#).

Course Philosophy and Approach

Over the one-week Woods Hole introductory component, this course introduces and calls for the analysis of secondary and some primary readings that range from accounts of early interactions among humans and whales in what is now the northeastern United States to the shift towards conservation of whale species and their habitat and related ideas throughout the global ocean. From subsistence to industrial harvest and processing of whales on the mainland and islands of the Americas, and voyages of New England whalers in the Pacific, to the development of a modern conservation industry that includes stakeholders from commercial, non-governmental, governmental, and intergovernmental stakeholders, class discussions will center on people from a variety of social and economic backgrounds. As people in whale-harvest and later people in whale-protection endeavors engaged in activities connected to migration, trade, and navigation, they helped shape the history of the Eastern Seaboard of the United States, many islands and, along the way, the broader Atlantic and global developments from the 15th century to today. Much of that history involved enormous amounts of exploitation of human and marine mammal resources. In this class, we will highlight and discuss how this exploitation shaped, and continues to shape, calls for environmental and social justice in ocean studies, industries, and governance.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

1. Understand the complex interplay of the environment, societal developments, and historical events in the New England whaling industry and whale conservation over time.
2. Trace the impact and influences of maritime culture and policy through literature, oral traditions, art, artifacts, legal documents, and the physical environment.
3. Apply interdisciplinary techniques and approaches to environmental studies.
4. Develop and support a thesis based on work with primary and secondary materials.
5. Contribute to a collaborative research and writing environment: present ideas for group feedback and offer and

exchange constructive critiques of written work in a peer revision process.

6. Interrogate and evaluate arguments and conclusions developed during Woods Hole research through in situ learning with local experts throughout island visits.
7. Learn or hone skills in critical reading and writing of history.

Instructor's Responsibilities: SEA is committed to supporting belonging, accessibility, justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (BAJEDI) through all teaching and program partnerships. In keeping with this commitment, I consider it my responsibility to create and maintain a learning environment that is equitable, accessible, inclusive, respectful, and comfortable for all students. I encourage questions and comments at any time during class, and I will be available either in person or via e-mail outside of class and will respond promptly to any of your questions or concerns. In addition, all graded assignments will be clearly explained, assessed objectively, and returned promptly so that every student has a clear sense of their progress in the class.

Students' Responsibilities: First, in a class devoted to extensive discussion, you must respect your classmates' interpretations of course readings and materials as well as their right to present and support those interpretations. Debates and disagreements are expected, but they must be respectful, and any opinions expressed must be supported by evidence.

Second, you must attend all sessions and complete all assignments. If circumstances outside of your control, such as medical emergencies, make it impossible for you to attend class or complete an assignment(s), you must contact me ahead of time, if practicable, or as soon as possible afterwards. We will work together on an equitable plan for making up the work or participation.

Succeeding in this course: In addition to the responsibilities for students listed above, achieving success in this course is contingent upon your willingness to actively participate in class, and engage with readings and other course materials. By this, I mean you need to take notes, both in class and while reading, ask questions that you may have from readings or lectures, and be willing to periodically interject with your own views and interpretations in class discussion sessions. If this last expectation is a challenge for you, please meet with me outside of class to discuss other options for active participation.

If there is something about the classroom environment, at any point throughout the semester, that hinders your participation, please come see me or any member of the SEA Faculty for assistance.

How Learning will be Assessed:

Assignment	Goal of Assignment	Course Goal	% of Grade
Shore Component/Full Semester			
Active Participation	Demonstrate engagement with course themes and readings (see “Succeeding in this Course” above).	1, 2 5-7	15
Journaling	Synthesize and make connections between class themes and readings.	1-7	10
Essay	Develop and support a thesis. Make use of historical sources drawn from class and independent research.	1-4, 7	25
Group Project and Presentation	Identify and examine environmental history issues and connect them to modern efforts related to conservation and development.	1-4 5, 7	25
Sea Component			
Summary Presentation	Based on time in the Woods Hole science community, re-examine and re-assess the impact of historical trends on modern environmental issues.	2, 5, 6	25

Assignments:

You will be required to write an argument-driven essay (7-10 pages), complete a group research project and presentation during the Woods Hole component, and make a final presentation summarizing your time in the Caribbean.



Journaling—Three reflective, one-page journal entries, focused on a class theme, are due at the end of each week of the program. A rubric will be provided.

Essay –Cultural Interactions of the Early Modern Atlantic: This essay of 7-10 double-spaced pages is due at the end of week 5. This is worth 25% of your overall grade. A rubric will be provided.

Group Project and Presentation – Environmental Issues in Coastal Communities: An annotated bibliography. A brief summary of the research process and findings and a presentation are due near the end of week 8. This is worth 25% of your overall grade. A rubric will be provided.

Summary Presentation – At the end of our time in the Caribbean. This is worth 25% of your overall grade. A rubric will be provided.

Expectations and Requirements:

Punctual **attendance is required** at every class meeting.

Active participation in class discussion is expected.

Late assignment submissions are not accepted without prior approval.

The policy on academic accuracy, listed below, will be strictly followed in this class.

The essay and other written and verbal work that you submit/present in this course must all be ***your original work***. You must take care to distinguish your own ideas and knowledge from wording or substantive information that you derive from one or more of your sources. The term “sources” includes not only published primary and secondary material, but also information and opinions gained directly from other people, AI tools, and text that you consult or use from any site on the Internet.

The responsibility for learning the proper forms of citation lies with you. Quotations must be placed properly within quotation marks and must be cited fully. In addition, all paraphrased material must be acknowledged completely. Whenever ideas or facts are derived from your reading and research, the sources must be indicated. (choose and conform to a particular style of citation. Consult your home institution’s library or speak to me for guidance.)

Considerations for use of internet sources:

As you browse websites, assess their usefulness very critically. Who posted the information and why? Can you trust them to be correct? Authoritative? Unbiased? (It’s okay to use a biased source as long as you incorporate it knowingly and transparently into



your own work.) Keep track of good sources that might be useful for subsequent assignments, and annotate in your bibliography any sites you use. Your annotation should include the name of the author or organization originating any material that you reference. If you can't identify the source, don't use it!

Course Calendar for Shore and Sea Components

The next two pages contain our proposed course calendar which is subject to change in response to our learning pace, class cancellations due to weather, etc. Any changes in the course calendar, including due dates for assignments, will be announced verbally in class, written on the whiteboard in the class, and posted on Blackbaud.

Required readings should be completed before class in order to get the most out of the class lectures, discussions, and activities.



Shore Component, Woods Hole					
Day	Date	Time	Topic	Required Readings	Assignment Due Dates
			Intro to Marine Environmental History Class	MEH Syllabus	
			Black and Indigenous Atlantic	Brooks	Essay thesis and outline due by 2100 on first Sunday.
			Whaling history choice	Davis, Melville, Philbrick, or Bolster	
			Indigenous New England choice	Shoemaker 2014, Shoemaker 2015, or Senier	
			Project Discussion		
					Submit Reflective Journal entries for review and feedback by 1600 on second Sunday.
			The Race for Whales	Horowitz, Dunbar-Hester	
			Whales, culture, biology	Giggs	
					Detailed essay outline and bibliography due by 2100 second Sunday.
			US Environmental History	Carson, Oreskes and Conway	



SEA COMPONENT ABOARD SSV CORWITH CRAMER	
Date(s)	Assignment Due Dates
	Board <i>Cramer</i> . Ship orientation begins.
	Watch-by-watch discussion sessions. Review of Reflective Journal entries (3 per week).
	Summary Presentations Completed.
Second Shore COMPONENT, Woods Hole	
Date(s)	Assignment Due Dates
New England and the Sea Choice	Labaree, Chiang, various Conservation Orgs working with whales and habitat
Rise of Tourism	Higham
	Full essay draft due by 2100 on final Sunday.
Presentations	Final Essay Due by 2100 on final day
Sea Component Discussion	

Readings and Course Material Selected from the Following:

Bolster. W. Jeffrey, *The Mortal Sea*, 2012.

Carson, Rachel, *Silent Spring*, 1962.

Cumbler, John, *Cape Cod*, 2014.

Davis, William, *Nimrod of the Sea*, 1874.



Dunbar-Hester, Christina, *Save the (White) Whale: Whalesong, the Cetacean Sensorium, and Exceptional Brains*, 2022.

Giggs, Rebecca, *Fathoms: The World in the Whale*, 2020.

Higham, James, Lars Bejder, and Rob Williams, *Whale-watching: Sustainable Tourism and Ecological Management*, 2014.

Horowitz, Joshua, *War of the Whales: A True Story*, 2015.

Labaree, Benjamin, *America and the Sea*, 1998.

Melville, Herman, *Moby Dick*, 1851.

Oreskes, Naomi, and Erik Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: how a handful of scientists obscured the truth on issues from tobacco smoke to global warming*, 2010.

Philbrick, Nathaniel, *In the Heart of the Sea*, 2000.

Senier, Siobhan, *Dawnland Voices: Indigenous Writings from New England*, 2014.

Shoemaker, Nancy, *Living with Whales: Documents and Oral Histories of Native New England Whaling History*, 2014.

Shoemaker, Nancy, *Native American Whale Men and the World: Indigenous Encounters and the Contingency of Race*, 2015.